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AMERICAN FORCES INFORMATION SERVICE

NEWS ARTICLES**Team Effort Saves Air Force Bomber Crew**By Jim Garamone
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, Dec. 12, 2001 -- Imagine ejecting from an out- of-control aircraft in the middle of the night over the Indian Ocean.

The four-man crew of a 20th Bomb Wing B-1B Lancer did just that and were rescued through the efforts of service members in the air and on the water.

Air Force Capt. William Steele, mission commander, said his aircraft had multiple malfunctions. "We found the aircraft was out of control and we had to eject," Steele said in a 4:15 p.m. (EST) phone interview from aboard the destroyer USS Russell.

The crew suffered minor injuries in the incident. "Going through an ejection like that was about the most violent thing I've ever felt," he said. "We're all pretty bruised up, and we have some cuts, but overall we're doing very well."

The aircraft went down at night. The crew spent about two hours in the water before being rescued. "In the water, we didn't see any hazards -- no sharks or anything like that," Steele said. "It was actually kind of comfortable. Nice warm water."

After the bomber crashed, a KC-10 refueler of the 79th Air Refueling Wing, Travis Air Force Base, Calif., began a search.

"We were taking off on a totally different mission when we heard the aircraft in distress," KC-10 pilot Maj. Brandon Nugent said by phone from the British naval base at Diego Garcia, an island in the Indian Ocean. "When we heard it had crashed, we went toward the last known location and began to search."

His co-pilot, Capt. Mike Dali, had spent time in the search and rescue field. They located at least some of the crew via their strobe lights and flares.

"It was pretty tense while we were looking," Nugent said. "We were all very happy when we found them."

The KC-10 and a Navy P-3 Orion circled the area and guided the Russell toward the crew.

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